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ABSTRACT

In Western Australia the suspension rate for Aboriginal students is double what could be expected on a population basis, and their exclusion rate is over seven times higher. In schools in Western Australia the act of removal from the classroom is widely practiced, and the process has been formalized to shift responsibility from the teachers to the students. Alternative narratives, particularly those of students enmeshed in the behavior management system of the school, are seldom heard because they represent a threat to the veneer of orderly practice at the school. The research described in this paper was conducted in a metropolitan school in which Aboriginal students represented about 15% of the student population. When an Aboriginal student was removed from the classroom, interviews were conducted with the student and the teacher. In all, 22 separate incidents were investigated by Aboriginal and nonAboriginal interviewers. Three of these incidents are explored in depth. The classrooms in which these events took place were sites of struggle rather than hegemonic structures in which the teacher ruled over the students. The relationship between the teacher and students varied considerably, but a common theme in the teacher interviews was the fear of losing control and there was frequent evidence of that control being quite tenuous. In this study, most of the behaviors that resulted in the sanction of being sent from the classroom were trivial, especially talking during class. They were usually perceived by the students to be trivial, and this recognition led the students to question the fairness of a system that imposed severe sanctions on what is normal social behavior. In many cases, teachers were characterized by an unwillingness to acknowledge the validity of student experience. (Contains 26 references.) (SLD)

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Power, Discipline and Minority Students in High School

Gary Partington

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Power, Discipline and Minority Students in High School.

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Introduction

In Western Australia the suspension rate for Aboriginal students is double what could be expected on a population basis, and their exclusion rate is over seven times higher (Gardiner, Evans & Howell, 1995). In the context of the social justice policies which are at the foundation of the Western Australian education system, this disparity is unjustifiable and needs to be remedied. However, it is consistent with the rate at which Aboriginal students drop out of school — this also is much higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal students (Education Department of Western Australia, 1996; Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice, 1994) Western Australia is not alone in this phenomenon, for other states also experience higher dropout rates for Aboriginal students (Gardiner, 1997; Groome & Hamilton, 1995) .

Research that has been conducted into Aboriginal students' school attrition (Coppell, 1986; Gillon, Knight and Harris, 1987) has focused on students who have already left school, or were already beyond Year 10 and so committed to continuing, rather than those in the early, and compulsory, years of their secondary schooling. Although there is much evidence to point to the relevance of factors external to the school (Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice, 1994) , among in-school factors, it is clear that improvements to Aboriginal retention must be accompanied by changes to the system of classroom management so that the arbitrary and excessive use of power is removed. Attention needs to focus on socially just approaches to management, in which the Aboriginal students' experience is included in the context of the classroom.

Ethnographic classroom research suggests that teachers might focus selectively on some behaviors, so that when they are performed by some students they are acceptable, but other students are censured for the same acts (Malin, 1990). In her research, Malin found that certain Aboriginal students were consistently condemned for behaviors that were acceptable among other students. Students who were continually subjected to negative teacher judgments eventually succumbed to rejection and became morose and withdrawn in the classroom. Partington & McCudden (1990) reported that teachers' interactions with some students are mutually advantageous as a consequence of reciprocal rewards (such as praise and affirmation), while with other students negative interactions consistently occur. Considerable evidence exists that Aboriginal students, because of different parenting and socio-cultural environments, are less likely than other students to accept the teacher's authority in the classroom (Christie, 1986; Harris, 1980; Partington & McCudden, 1992) and so they become targets of the school's discipline policy.

Much of the wisdom associated with school discipline derives from studies of the deviant nature of a minority of students in schools (See, for example, Charles, 1992). The widespread belief that students are individually responsible for indiscipline in the classroom is promoted by classroom management theorists who ignore the contribution to discipline of other factors. Rogers (1990), for example, attributes misbehavior to "boredom, immaturity, inability to master the curriculum, low tolerance for frustration, or an emotionally disturbed home situation" (p.23). Such claims pathologize students. Two issues emerge. First, a view appears to be widely held among teachers that there is an ideal kind of classroom in which students are silent unless spoken to, polite, deferential and work hard. Second, teachers are selective as to who is expected to conform to this model of classroom interaction (Steed, 1985). The classroom becomes a place, therefore,

in which, for a variety of reasons, some students come under the teacher's gaze in negative ways, so that they are regularly identified as trouble makers who disrupt the proceedings of the classroom. As a consequence, these students are blamed for disruptions while similar behaviors by others is overlooked. Steed (1985) reported similar findings from a study of schools in London:

> Pupil comment suggests that not all such interruptions are responded to by teachers in the same way. They complain of unfairness, that other pupils engaging in the same behaviour are not punished, highlighting what, for them seemed the large degree of arbitrariness and chance. (Steed, 1985, p. 5).

As long as misbehavior is regarded as an individual pathology, however, the roles of the school and its teachers are neglected in the construction of misbehavior. From the school's point of view, it is the arbiter of discipline among potentially disruptive students and does not see that teachers contribute to disruptions. As the above research has shown, however, the notion of the neutral teacher is not valid. In addition to exercising control over students through the use of careful monitoring and the application of disciplinary strategies, teachers actively participate in the construction of behavior problems in the classroom, both as a consequence of the conflict of teacher knowledge and student knowledge and through inappropriate use of power. The adherence of teachers to beliefs in the correctness of their understanding of the classroom social context, as well as the tendency to ignore the alternative realities of students who are similarly engaged in constructing their social fabric, results in misunderstandings and conflicts. While the teacher might construct some student behaviors as deviant and warranting the imposition of sanctions, students might perceive those behaviors as valid. In return, they perceive behaviors of the teacher as antagonistic or unfair.

An enduring "grand narrative" (Lyotard, 1984) of schooling has developed in which the school impartially transmits what is considered to be desirable knowledge to students who must behave compliantly, submissively and deferentially if they are to learn. As a part of this narrative, teachers adopt a benign authority over the students — avoiding preferential treatment or discrimination — in order to bring about learning. The notion that the student is solely responsible for indiscipline in the classroom is part of this grand narrative and results in alienation of students and increased dissention in classrooms. In this paper the context in which students are subject to disciplinary acts by the teacher are examined from a poststructuralist point of view to show that teachers construct their perceptions of student behaviors without reference to the students' perspectives, and so injustice and escalation of incidents occurs.

In schools in Western Australia, the act of removal from the classroom is widely practiced. A range of strategies has been developed for schools to regulate the processes by which disruptive students are controlled. By formalizing the process of student removal, the school shifts responsibility from the teachers to the students. Instead of the individual whim of a teacher resulting in students being sent from class, the teachers follow a procedure laid down in school policy and supported at local, district and state levels. The procedure establishes an impartial structure and accompanying strategies which teachers can employ. These strategies empower teachers to impose strict behavior regimes on students — regimes that elsewhere are only tolerated in prisons. For example, in the Canter "style" of assertive behavior management, the teacher states, "It is against the rules for you to talk without permission during the lesson" (Charles, 1992, p. 98). In order to facilitate these conditions for learning, teachers must utilize a range of strategies which ensure the students remain compliant, submissive and deferential. Foucault's writings provide a convenient starting point for an analysis of what processes are employed. In particular, the use of power to sustain a desirable learning environment is central to the work of the school.

The practices of the school in maintaining discipline can be interpreted in the light of the categories which Foucault (1975, 1991) established in examining relations of power. These include surveillance, classification, normalization, and exclusion. In

addition, the power/knowledge nexus is central to an understanding of the effectiveness of disciplinary practices in school. While Gore (1995) identifies a range of additional power relations incorporated in Foucault's work, the above four appear to be central to notions of classroom management.

The Research Project

Alternative narratives, particularly those of students who become enmeshed in the behavior management system of the school, are usually not heard because they represent a threat to the veneer of orderly practice that is maintained in the school. Having been labeled as disruptive, even deviant, these students have no voice and their arguments and protestations are often discounted by school authorities. In the present study, the school adhered to a classroom management regime based on the Glasser, (1969) model, and students who had been through the school's behavior management system for classroom infractions were interviewed regarding their infringements. At the same time, teachers were also interviewed to obtain their views of what happened and why. The research was conducted in a metropolitan school in which approximately 85 Aboriginal students were enrolled — representing about 15% of the student population. When an Aboriginal student was removed from the classroom for misdemeanors, interviews were conducted with the teacher and the student. The students and teachers were interviewed as soon as possible after each event in order to obtain their views on the situation. They were asked to tell in their own words what events led to the student being sent out of the room and how they interpreted those events. Suitable situations were identified by a cooperating teacher in the school who arranged the interviews. Altogether 22 separate incidents were investigated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewers. All students were Aboriginal; none of the teachers was Aboriginal (there were no Aboriginal teachers in the school).

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Given the subjective nature of the research, validity of the data was checked by noting agreement between students and teachers on matters over which there should be no debate — the course of events and the procedures adopted — and so enable a check on their veracity. Documentary evidence — records of disciplinary procedures by teachers, and student contracts drawn up to resolve conflicts — was also used to check validity of reports. There was a very high level of consistency between teacher and student accounts. In only two cases was there marked disagreement between these accounts: once due to a student making transparently false claims regarding her actions in a dispute, and another time when the teacher was exceptionally vague regarding events.

In this study, three of the incidents will be explored fro a poststructuralist perspective in order to identify the relations of power employed in the disciplinary processes.

The School Discipline Policy

> You can't run a school with children wandering off loose. We are legally responsible for them. We have got to see that they don't get hurt, amongst other things and if he walks out of your classroom, even if he only tripped over and fell and banged his head, I mean it would be my fault because I let him go. (BA 3/7, 17)

Control of students was a fundamental role of Central High School and was grounded in legislative and regulatory codes. In common with other schools in the State, the school's discipline policy was termed the *Managing Student Behaviour Policy* and was instituted in the school in the mid-1980s when all state schools were required to introduce such policies. The policy document outlined steps teachers should take to resolve a conflict. Initial steps in the process of settlement were intended to resolve conflict within the classroom. Using steps which drew heavily on Glasser's (1969) views regarding classroom management, these steps included self-reflection so that the teacher questioned his or her approach; provision of positive reinforcement; questioning the student – "What

are you doing?", "Is it against the rules?"; warning the student – "This cannot continue, we have to work it out. Obey the rules or ...."; and isolation within the room or outside. If all these failed, then the student was to be referred to another teacher, with the severity of the incident determining the appropriate person: a buddy teacher for an infraction that can be readily resolved; the year coordinator if it isn't resolved satisfactorily; or the deputy principal for a major infraction such as fighting or swearing at the teacher. Satisfactory resolution required a contract to be written by the student and agreed to by the teacher. Teachers reported that they were contented with the policy, and a number of teachers reported that they relied heavily on it to maintain control in their classrooms.

> He was behaving in a manner that had to be, something had to be done about it and the policies that we have here, or the avenues that we have for discipline, we stick to, I mean that's school policy, that's what you do regardless of age, color, creed, whatever. (DJ, 21/6, 5).

The coordinator of the school's MSB program summed up the process as follows:

> It is a circular type process where the student is continually given opportunities to solve the problem and if he doesn't solve them he takes it to the next level and the punishments or the consequences for that are more and more severe. If at the end of a day in a contract room he still hasn't resolved the problem or is unwilling to resolve the problem he can then be suspended by the deputy principals which doesn't happen very often for lower level problems....If the problem starts off at a higher level like language in the classroom, bad language in a classroom, at a teacher or another student, the student could go to the contract room straight away or if it is particularly bad could be suspended straight away bypassing all the teacher and MSB process. But at the end of that still there is a contract written and a commitment is made to see that it doesn't happen again. There has to be a resolution for that student to get back in the classroom and that in a nutshell is the MSB system. (AW 7/12, 1)

By applying the processes described in the policy, teachers were able to direct misbehaving students into channels where other, more experienced and more powerful, teachers were able to assist in controlling the students. Rather than the individual teacher being isolated in the classroom and unable to rely on support from others, the MSB system gave all teachers access to defined and guaranteed support. In so doing, it established behaviors that were expected of both students and teachers in the classroom. For teachers, these behaviors included the use of both positive and negative reinforcements. Good behavior was to be rewarded, while bad behavior was apprehended through a series of graduated steps which led to removal from the classroom. The system demanded conformity, both of teachers and students:

> Be as consistent as it is humanly possible even if you're wrong. If you're consistently wrong the kids can deal with that and they can adjust with it but if you are wrong about one thing or you are just off what all the other teachers are doing about one thing but more consistent on it the kids will still cope with that but if you fluctuate your standards and you do different things when different kids make the same mistake they'll tear you to pieces. They have to know this happens if I do this and if it does they'll live with that and they'll stay within the bounds, that's all consistency. (AW 7/12/, 55)

Such views acknowledged the fragile nature of the MSB system. There was a belief that hegemony would be maintained only so long as there was consistency in the application of the rules, no matter what those rules were. The dominance of the school over the student was asserted through the hierarchical nature of the system: the classroom teachers asserted power over students; year coordinators backed them up and at the same time exercised a supervisory role over classroom teachers, particularly those who had trouble coping with the system. Above the coordinators was the deputy principal who exercised ultimate authority in discipline matters, including the right to suspend students.

The system worked as was evidenced by the regular removal of students from class to buddy teachers, the contract room or the deputy principal. Teachers relied on the support provided to cope with the demands of classroom teaching. In the school, relations between teachers and students were often discordant. Students challenged new

teachers when they took over their classes. One relief teacher who experienced the challenges of taking over a class in the absence of the regular teacher stated,

> I remember at the beginning when I first started teaching here I was scared, scared of the boys and probably of the Aboriginal boys and I've recovered now, I'm not scared any more because there's a lot of support and if I tell Sean what's happening.... Last week all the kids decided they were just going to swear at me so I told the Deputies and I told the Head of Department and they came down so hard it was great and now they're all scared of me. It was wonderful. (RP 12/12, 21).

At a rational level there are many arguments for teachers to control students. However, the system did not function in a rational manner. Rather than administer discipline to misbehaving students, in many cases teachers interacted with the students to create the misbehaviors that occurred. Some students were quite aware of the unfairness of many of the actions of teachers and reacted to perceived abuses of power by the teachers. In most cases, such responses brought the imposition of sanctions more quickly and more severely.

In the interviews, teachers reported their efforts to gain compliance from students before sending them from the room. However, these efforts usually did not conform to the policy, instead consisting of reiterations of demands for compliance. In their description of incidents, teachers and students rarely mentioned the employment of escalating procedures, instead, the teacher going directly to sending the student from the room after reaching a critical point in interaction:

> It just got to the stage where after having told him several times to settle down and stay and work, it got to the stage where it was just too disruptive and getting other students from learning, basically. He had MSB and was asked to remove himself from the room. This sort of behavior is just common occurrence with John, it seems to be his normal pattern of behavior. (AR 22/6, 11).

Instead of impartially applying policy, teachers selectively focused on some aspects of policy and ignore others. There was a perception among the teachers in the school that the students who offended against the rules in the policy were deviant:

> They're definitely kids that don't fit in the system. They do not fit and if you try to keep them in there they only serve to disrupt the rest of the system. There has to be a release for them and a relief for the rest in the mainstream. These kids do not fit. They're the square peg going into the round hole. It doesn't matter how hard you hit they're not going to fit, so you need something but to give them lollies [sweets] all day long isn't the answer. They need structure and discipline consistency. (CJ 12/12, 22).

Teachers imposed their interpretations of events on the interactions that occurred. The targets of their discipline varied in their perceptions of the behaviors. Although the teachers' and students' reports of the events concurred strongly, there was considerable disagreement over the underlying reasons for the apparent misbehavior. In approximately half the cases, the students accused the teacher of contributing to the problem, and, from the evidence supplied by the teachers and the students, in a quarter of the cases, it was clear that the teachers were primarily responsible for student misbehavior. Factors which contributed to management problems included boredom, peer problems, racism, teacher insensitivity, and communication failure. Cultural and social differences between the Aboriginal students and their teachers contributed to the failure of adequate communication. Classification of some students as behavior problems led to more drastic — and less justifiable — action against them so that in some cases quite inappropriate action was taken. As Gore (1995) notes, the repressive potential of classification is quite clear and in the present research, classification was a major step towards irreversible negative expectations of students.

Although some of the teachers divulged their involvement in the students' removal from the room, they did not see this as contributing to the problem. Instead, they reported that the reaction of the student to their directives was the cause of the misbehavior. This construction of the problem as entirely deriving from the students' behaviors, and missing the contribution of their own actions, is reminiscent of Foucault's

connection of power and knowledge. The teachers construct their own interpretation of events and, because the power to impose outcomes consistent with their version of events rests with them, the students suffer the consequences, despite alternative possibilities.

The system was constructed to support the teachers in their decisions, so that from their perspective, the system became hegemonic: it was accepted without question. The policy was designed so that the teachers would be supported by higher levels of authority prevailed, as the Deputy Principal reported:

> I get a number of comments about the support that they feel it gives them, that they know that a kid is going to be dealt with consistently and fairly strongly, if they're sent to me. I think they feel comfortable with that. They know damn well that if they send somebody up he's not going to be given a cuddle and sent back again, that their authority is going to be followed through and in most cases it is, although I won't suspend unless I'm completely happy that what happened, happened. (SD, 30/6. 17).

It was rare for teachers not to be supported and there was strong acceptance for the policy in the school. The belief that the students were at fault and that the school was blameless, however, permeated widely among teachers. This led to the creation of reputations for students who came to the attention of teachers, so that some students were labeled as "trouble makers". Once labeled, there was little a student could do to lose the reputation (cf. Robinson, 1992). Students with reputations were likely to be blamed for misbehavior more often than others, and to be treated more severely for misbehaviors. Students lacked the resources to directly influence the course of events if they thought they were being unfairly treated. Teachers tended to read into situations motivations and attitudes that might not have been present. The responses of teachers to students who were categorized as trouble makers were consistent with Foucault's observations in *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1991) of the nature of punishment, in which high visibility, minute control of activity and the demand for "normality" of behavior thrust students into situations in which they can do no right. Although the classroom is not as severe as the Panopticon described in *Discipline and Punish,* students nevertheless were very visible in classrooms, and procedures were enacted to increase the visibility of offenders and potential offenders.

Behaviors which, elsewhere, would not deserve comment become crucial issues in the classroom. The normalization of students (Foucault, 1975/1991) in the classroom through the demand for homogeneous behaviors results in outcomes that, elsewhere in society, would be regarded as abnormal. Students are not permitted to talk during lessons; movement around the class is prohibited; on-task behavior is demanded at all times; students must address the teacher respectfully regardless of the teacher's behaviour to the student. All behaviour and performance of students is subjected to close scrutiny. In the present study, while there were exceptions, most of the behaviors for which students were penalized were those that, elsewhere in society, would attract no comment.

The End of a Grand Narrative

To illustrate this point of the abnormality of the normal classroom, an incident which resulted in an Aboriginal student being suspended will be examined. Briefly, the student refused to accept a teacher's decision to leave his confiscated cap on the teacher's desk, removed it and as a consequence was reported to the deputy principal for failing to follow a teacher's directive. The Deputy Principal sent him to the contract room. At first sight, such a consequence appears appropriate, but the process by which the cap came to be confiscated gives an insight into the construction of the student as deviant, and the teacher as the arbiter of knowledge.

The student, Steve, forgot his calculator for the lesson, which was mathematics. The teacher, Mrs. Falls, had several calculators but loaned these to other students because Steve had forgotten his calculator the previous lesson as well.

> He actually did take my calculator as well at one stage. Another student had borrowed it and he took it from the other student so he could use it. So I took it off him and gave it back to the student that I'd given it to so that he could do his work. But, that's another problem his [Steve's] coming unprepared for class. (KF, 22/6. 34)

Steve sat at his desk unable to do the work. He commenced to

> make noises and he wasn't doing his work and he was just sort of not making any effort so I sent him out of the classroom and he stood outside the classroom for a while. He was a bit awkward out there and then after a while I said "All right come back in and sit at the front" where there was a desk and he sat at the front and he had his hat on again when he came back into the classroom, because he put it on when he went out of the classroom. I don't know why they have to have their hats on all the time. So, I took it off him and I put it on my desk and I said "You can have it back at the end of the day". And I went around the class doing what I was doing with the rest of the kids and then I saw that he had the hat on his head, so I said "you're not allowed to wear it in the classroom". I put it on my desk and I didn't give you permission to take it back, so could you please take it off." And he didn't take it off, so I actually physically took it off his head and put it on my desk again, and he snatched it back and he said "You're not having my hat". And I said "Sorry, but you're not making the rules here". And he took it and I said "Go down to see Mr. Davis". Because that was deliberate disobedience then. (KF, 22/6. 12)

So, in a manner which is quite consistent with the practices identified by Foucault (1975/1991) in *Discipline and Punish,* in her efforts to force Steve into docility, the teacher made him more visible by placing him at the front of the room. Furthermore, she sought to control his behavior by removing his hat. Although Steve admitted that he was in the wrong for grabbing his hat back, he felt angry when Mrs. Falls took it from him:

> I: How did you feel?
>
> Steve: Angry. I felt like throwing something at her, everything that was on the ground. Too heavy.
>
> I: But how did, like — make you feel angry towards her for taking it off you or just for sending you out?
>
> Steve: Taking me hat off me.
>
> I: Did you try to explain that you forgot you had it on?
>
> Steve: Yeh, I forgot I had it on but she kept on saying you'll get it at the end of the day and I just said, "Nu, I'm grabbing it now." So, when I grabbed it, she sent me out to Mr. Davis's office.

Because he was angry at Mrs. Falls because she wouldn't listen when he tried to convince her to let him have the hat back (SW 22/6, 34), Steve did not go immediately to the Deputy Principal's office, but walked around the school until his anger had diminished.

In the act of "normalizing" Steve by removing his hat, Mrs. Falls made assumptions about Steve that were inaccurate. She assumed that the act of wearing the hat into class was intended to aggravate her, so she confiscated it. She expected Steve to behave in ways that were more appropriate to middle class, Anglo students rather than Aboriginal students because she also stated that "If at the end of the lesson he'd come to me and said, 'Could I have my hat back?' I would have given it back without any second thought. But he chose to take it." (KF 22/6, 24). For the teacher, there was a protocol to be observed in the process of regaining the hat, a protocol about which Steve appeared to be ignorant. This protocol was that Steve should defer his demands for the hat until the end of the lesson, then go to the teacher and, probably in a pleading tone, request the hat. Lacking the cultural knowledge necessary to comprehend the teacher's willingness to negotiate, and unskilled in the subtle features of negotiation by rules more familiar to middle class members of the dominant cultural group, Steve assumed she was unyielding when she said he couldn't have it back until the end of the day. He reported that he would have been willing to give it up for a lesson, but "not the whole day" (SW 22/6. 36).

Clearly, there was a lack of understanding between Steve and the teacher. In normalizing Steve by attributing to him understandings and values that were appropriate to middle class Anglo students, Mrs. Falls constructed a reality which didn't exist in her classroom. Furthermore, she ignored a reality that did exist: the importance of peer approval. The wearing of caps was an important element of peer status but the school rules prohibited their wearing in classrooms. Also, being shouted at by teachers was a grave loss of face (shame) for Aboriginal students who often retaliated in like manner, on the grounds that the rudeness and shame associated with being shouted at justified a similar response (Harris, 1980).

So while the teacher constructed a view of the classroom as a middle class, dominant cultural context, Aboriginal students maintained a different reality. This fact was of no consequence to the teacher, who, even if she had known it, perceived accurately that she held the power to determine whose view of reality would prevail. It is likely that the student was aware of this also. His action in taking back his hat and defiantly wearing it ensured that he regained the status which he had lost as a consequence of being shouted at and losing his hat.

The actions of the teacher made a direct contribution to the events that occurred. Had Steve been gainfully occupied during the lesson, misbehavior would have been less likely; the removal of the calculator positioned Steve as a less than worthy member of the class and would have alienated him and possibly led to his attention seeking behavior; the teacher's decision to sit him in an isolated desk at the front of the room increased his visibility to the rest of the class (also a shame experience for Aboriginal students) and would have further alienated Steve; had Mrs. Falls been more accepting of Steve's hat-wearing on his return to the class and reminded him to remove it, he would not have been put in a position to claim it back. Having taken the hat from him, if the teacher had provided the more realistic option of returning it at the end of the lesson, Steve might have been more accepting of his temporary loss. The teacher's construction of Steve as a problem is overshadowed by her failure to comprehend the construction upon which she is engaged. The assumption of righteousness on her part — grounded in the secure knowledge that comes with the power to determine what is acceptable — presents the school, not the student, as deviant.

It was unlikely that Steve's position in the class would improve. In discussing solutions to the problems she perceived, the teacher reported that her surveillance of him would have to be more rigorous.

> I: So, where do you go from here with him when you're having maths again?
>
> Kay: Well, that's the problem. I think I have to send him out through the MSB system at the faintest hint of him doing the wrong thing, because he's shown that he's not really prepared to do anything of his own volition to improve the matters and so now he has to go through the system. I would rather they weren't out of my class, although when he's in my class he doesn't do a great deal of work but I think at least he might be learning by osmosis if nothing else, if he's there. (KF, 22/6, 26).

Steve was in the process of gaining a reputation. The MSB system in schools is designed to deal with each incident as a single event, so that when the student has completed his or her period of reflection in the contract room or the buddy teacher's room or on suspension and has completed a behavior contract with the teacher, each new incident has to be treated as a separate event unless it can be shown to be an infringement of the contract. It would appear, from the teacher's comment, that Steve has been positioned as a behavior problem and will be treated outside the guidelines of the behavior management system.

Mrs. Falls uses the language of the MSB system in her description of Steve's behavior: "He seems to want to play up and yet, basically, he's quite bright, if he wants to. He chooses not to." (KF 22/6, 32). We can question whether Steve really had a choice in his construction as a deviant student. The teacher's positioning of him as a student unworthy of using her calculator, his visibility as a miscreant, his shaming by

removing his hat, and the unseemly tussle over the hat when he refused to give it up, all contributed to his "playing up". The social cost of choosing to become a "docile body" (Foucault, 1975/1991) was possibly too great a price to pay, particularly when he would have considered the teacher's actions to be offensive.

Steve acknowledged that he was in the wrong for grabbing his hat back. Most of the students who were interviewed regarding their misdemeanors also considered that they were guilty of offences. There was a distinction between the specific offence, such as refusing to obey a teacher's directive, and the *cause* of the situation. As noted above, about half of the students who were interviewed said the cause was at least partly contributed to by the teacher. Rather than *choosing* to misbehave, they considered that they were backed into a corner by the teacher and were left with no choice. The teacher constructed a social situation which left them with no alternative. For example, even though Steve admited fault, he reported that his anger overrode this transgression.

I: So, you're in contract for the rest of the class?

Steve: Yep.

I: Do you think that's fair?

Steve: Yeh.

I: Cause you caused it?

Steve: Yeh. I felt angry because she wouldn't listen to me

Teachers are dealing with people with both perceptions and feelings. To take actions which are perceived to be wrong or which offend students' feelings can quite possibly exacerbate the initial situation so that it escalates to a higher order problem. This is what occurred in the following incident.

The Consequences of Talking in Class

Talking in class was a major reason for being sent from the room. Despite the innocuous nature of such an activity, in the classroom talking became a prohibited activity and this marked the distinctive nature of schooling as an alienating activity for many students. Behavior which was an accepted feature of the rest of their social lives was regulated rigorously in the classroom and was the foundation of several of the incidents. In the following incident, the teacher, Fran Lewis, sent three Year 10 students from her mathematics class, including Evan Mourish, an Aboriginal student.

Fran: At the beginning of the lesson we do mental and of course they organise their files and so on and there was bit of giggling at the back of the room. The only thing is, the room is not mine, so there were desks all over the place. So there were three boys sitting right at the back and when I heard the giggling I straight away said to myself "Are they up to some mischief?". So, what I only asked them, if they could shift their desks to the middle of the room, all three of them. So they'd have a better view rather than sitting behind other students and they just refused.

I: Just point blank?

Fran: Yeh, they just said they're not doing anything. I said, "I know you're not doing anything but I want you to shift your desk in the middle of the room" because the way the room was set up there was nothing in the middle, it's all blank. Desks on the side so I just wanted them to put their desks in the middle and they refused.

I: And then what happened?

Fran: And the next thing is well, when they refused I said "Well that's deliberately disobeying teacher's instructions and the only alternative I could do was just send them out of class through the MSB system and I sent all three of them. (FL, 30/6, 2)

Evan, a member of the group of three students who were sent out, confirmed the course of events, and explained why they didn't move:

> Evan: Ah, all we just, we thought um, it was unfair because we weren't doing anything and um, that's why we didn't move, because we didn't think we were doing anything so, um we wondered why we were getting jarred [disciplined], um so we just didn't move. (EM, 3/7, 16).

The refusal to obey the teacher was clearly an infringement of the school's MSB policy and placed the students in a conflict situation which ended in them being sent to the contract room. The students, however, knew that they were doing nothing wrong and so they interpreted the directive to move their desks as an indication that they were being treated unfairly by the teacher.

For her part, the teacher possessed additional knowledge to which the students were not privy. Consistent with Foucault's (1975/1991) description of the Panopticon which allowed those in authority to view those under their control, the teacher was able to maintain an ongoing surveillance of the class, and this extended to their communication. In this case, Evan possessed a particularly penetrating laugh which the teacher identified readily from among the general noise of the students getting ready for the lesson. His laugh focused the teacher's attention on the possibility of management problems. Laughter in class was regarded as a warning sign of potential future conflict:

> Fran: [When we were resolving the conflict later] I explained to them "The reason I moved you is that I was avoiding any conflict or any situation in the future for the next 20 or 30 minutes or whatever, for the rest of the lesson". So, they understood that after I'd explained to them but at the moment in time, no. Having other kids you can't explain in detail. (FL, 30/6, 20)

Also, the three boys were sitting directly behind three girls, and the teacher was concerned that the boys would play up to that audience. Ms. Lewis, then, had three reasons for reorganizing the classroom. Despite this, her neglect of the perceptions of the students created the conflict that ensued: as she and Evan acknowledged in their interviews, there was a general hubbub in the class at the time. In her effort to get the three students to shift, her exercise of power was fettered by the students' alternative knowledge, that they were doing nothing wrong at the time.

What the teacher neglected in her interpretation of the classroom situation was as important as what she focused on. In particular, she neglected the students' right to fairness. It was clear from Evan's statements in the interview that he, and the other students, had well developed notions of what constituted fairness in classroom practice and when the teacher exceeded what was considered to be fair, they refused to comply. In other words, they regarded the teacher's exercise of power as illegitimate in the classroom context.

When asked, the teacher claimed that she had no idea why the students refused. It is clear that in the exercise of power over the students she was neglecting the alternative knowledge they possessed as a consequence of nearly ten years in the education system. Power doesn't exist in a vacuum, depending instead on the perceptions of those over whom power is exercised. If the target of the exercise of power is not concerned at the consequences of failing to comply with demands, then the power is negated. Also, if they are aware that there is no substance to the claim to power, it doesn't exist. In the present case the teacher's claim to exercise power over the students in getting them to move failed but, because she was supported by the school's MSB policy, she was able to redirect her claim to power by accusing them of refusing to obey her. She resorted to this more serious charge because "it [refusal to obey the teacher] has a sort of impact on the rest of the kids and they say, 'Oh, he got away with it, I can get away with it as well'". In keeping with the views of many teachers interviewed, the fear of the rest of the class refusing to accept her power motivated the teacher to utilize the school's MSB policy.

It is clear that the teacher's initial actions were inappropriate: she was in the wrong in this altercation. It demonstrates, however, the extent to which teachers feel that their control in the classroom is tenuous and depends on the willingness of the students to accept their authority, and even more on the support of the system to confirm their power.

In the absence of a supportive power structure, it is likely that teachers who failed to demonstrate consideration for the students would lose control. The actions Ms Lewis could have taken to avoid the injustice to the students and the stress on her own life (Bernard, 1988) were simple, and might have involved requesting all students to rearrange the room. The classroom in which the teacher is unable to acknowledge that an instruction is wrong and that the students have a legitimate complaint can indeed be represented as a battleground, which implies considerable stress on both teachers and students, which is not a suitable environment for learning.

Despite the apparent rightness of the students' response, it is surprising that even though Evan thought the action of the teacher was unfair, he believed he was at fault for not obeying immediately. After the event, and after going through the system of discipline, it is possible that Evan has come to accept the teacher's version of reality. The teacher's explanation "counted" more than his (Usher & Edwards, 1994), possiby because her reality was reinforced by the power of the system. Power, however, is not monolithic. Rather than being directed down from teachers onto studetns, it is diffuse and influences all the participants in the education system. For the teachers, there was a price to pay in utilizing the system to reinforce their power: their increased visibility to those in authority above them. As one coordinator noted, some teachers refused to use the MSB system because

> I think possibly because it is a slight they will see as an admission that their not teaching properly or that they are having problems in the class which they won't admit to. (AW, 7/12, 8)

The Failure of the System

Another student who admitted he was in the wrong — and who had several evictions from the classroom during the year — was Colin Bradley, who admitted fault when he and another boy played up in line prior to entry to the classroom. They continued to aggravate the teacher and the buddy teacher after initial reprimands:

Colin: Cos me and Bossy was talking in line and then she said to us to get out of line and she got us out of line and she let us go back into the class and we talked there and on our way 'round to the other teacher we kept on muckin' around, throwing honkey nuts and cheeking our teacher back and laughing while he was talkin' and that.

I: The other teacher that you were sent to?

Colin: Yes. (CB, 7/12, 10).

Colin was quite open in his admission of guilt in the incident, reporting that he and Ken, another boy, deliberately stirred the teacher:

I: Do you think you were trying to stir this teacher up?

Colin: Yes, I was, me and Ken. The way we were acting, yeh we were trying to get her stirred up, so she could send us out of the class.

I: Why did you want to be sent out of the class?

Colin: Most of the time it is boring, you know, we do work but you know it's ..

I: What sort of class is this.

Colin: It's science. We don't really like science and we just wasn't in the mood so we just started playin up.

I: Do you think that you two was the right target for the discipline, I mean do you think you should have got into trouble?

Colin: Yeh, we should have got in trouble, the way we were acting; yes we should've got in trouble, we deserved to get in trouble.

I: So who do you think was responsible?

Colin: Us. Me and Ken. Mainly cos of the way we were acting.

The events outlined by Colin were confirmed by Ken and by the two teachers involved in the disciplinary action, Lena Drummond and Hank Foster. Both Colin and Ken were deliberately antagonistic towards the two teachers in order to get out of schoolwork. A buddy relationship had been established by Miss Drummond with Mr Foster, the senior science teacher, in order to deal with another student who was giving Miss Drummond trouble. As it turned out, the other student behaved himself on the day but Colin and Ken played up so they were sent to Mr. Foster in the staff room. He directed them to his office and on the way there, the boys commenced throwing "honkey nuts" (Eucalyptus tree seed containers) to other boys. This was observed by Mr. Foster, who questioned them about it. They were cheeky in return, so he sent them to the Deputy Principal and they were given a day's contract room suspension.

The continual goading of the teachers in order to avoid class work signified a failure of the MSB system in the school because the students deliberately chose eviction from the classroom. The system was founded on a belief that students would seek to avoid the consequences of misbehavior and this action concerned Hank Foster:

> Hank: That really annoys me more than anything else. I mean, it also implies to me that our system isn't working.
>
> I: What can we do about it Hank? If they don't care.
>
> Hank: I don't know that one. Probably in the too hard basket because .. well it is really because if we knew I think we'd be doing it.
>
> I: Yes of course.
>
> Hank: I mean, even things, like we were just talking about then, the contract room system that we have, I was here when we first instigated the whole MSB policy and one of the ideas of the contract room was that it was a minimum of one day and the student stayed there until such time as they sorted it out with the teacher. Basically that's not happening. The minimum has become the time period and Colin was saying to Lena (so this is secondhand), oh you know, I don't care if I get in the contract room. So you know he didn't care because he sat there the rest of the day and it doesn't carry on so "my bad behavior will just simply mean I can sit in silence for half a day", whereas I tend to think it's got to be a longer term thing and they are there basically until they sort it out. There has to be a maximum and if they haven't sorted it out after a certain time it really is the Principal, and what he then does I don't know. The idea was the students take responsibility and they're not because they just see it as a little time slot. (HF, 7/12, 6).

The power the teachers possessed was negated once again because the consequences — going to the contract room — were more attractive than the alternative — remaining in class. Colin has exercised his power — the power of rejection of the system — to choose what appears to be an undersirable outcome. The power/knowledge relationship which is fostered by schools, so that students have little choice but to accept the imposition of school power on them if they wish to share in the knowledge which the school conveys, fails when either or both the power or the knowledge is rejected. A characteristic of several students who had been sent from the room was that they found the subject boring. Because the subject held no interest for them, the exercise of power — exclusion from the fruits of schooling — held no meaning for them.

The report on the incident by Colin, however, suggests a more complex construction of the situation than just rejection. Although he found the subject boring, Colin approved of the school's behavior management program and expressed liking for the teacher, who he said was supportive:

> I: But overall do you think you get on with her most of the time?
>
> Colin: Yes, when she's settled down I want to go back to explain it. She just keeps telling me that I'm Aboriginal and that I want make a name for myself cos there's not many Aboriginal people that can make names for themselves, like a lot of people they've got potential but they don't want to use it, Aboriginal people, and she just keeps telling me that I'm one that she reckons is going to go to University and that's what I want to do.

....

I: So what sort of discipline would you like the teacher to use when you get into trouble?

Colin: The way she's goin now, I think she's doing it right, all of us boys, they just keep goin and goin. I think sendin us out is the right thing. (CB, 7/12, 77).

Unlike other teachers, Miss Drummond was aware of the significance of education for Colin and the contribution he could make to the cause of Aboriginal people. This may have been the basis for Colin's ongoing support for the teacher's actions against him. He appeared to respect her as a person, not for the knowledge which she could convey or the power she possessed. Colin was not pathological in his misbehavior. Nor was he expressing deeper opposition to the school as an oppressive institution. His support for the teacher and the system suggests that the choices he made were based on what, to him, were sound reasons. When he was bored, he knew how to escape from class. His deliberate misbehavior was a calculated effort to escape from the classroom. He clearly bore no ill-will towards the teacher but used the system selectively to his perceived advantage.

A week later, Colin was once again in trouble with Lena Drummond. On this occasion, he chose to report to the Deputy Principal for refusing to obey a teacher's directive rather than commence work on the set activity, which was a choice between a reading and a drawing activity related to human biology. Because he didn't have a pen, he was unable to do the activity and failed to apply himself to the task. Miss Drummond noticed he wasn't working, although the other two members in his group were. She told him to sit elsewhere, which angered Colin, who refused to accept a pen from her and, after some considerable time spent by Miss Drummond to get him to work, chose to go to the Deputy Principal rather than comply.

In this case, the teacher was conscious of the need to assert her dominance over Colin because the incident followed closely on the previous week's event, and was a direct contravention of the contract Colin had agreed to.

Lena: Today he would have sat there. He wasn't being a nuisance as such, chatting a bit, but I moved him. He would have sat there, but it was just that he was refusing to [work] and so close after the other [incident] I couldn't just let him totally refuse to do what he was told, you know they had diagrams [to draw]. He could have picked out a diagram to draw. You know it was a sort of an alternative thing. If he didn't want to do the writing part he could have done the diagram. Most of them enjoy the drawings and diagrams so he could have taken that as an easy way out. He was determined not to do what I wanted him to do. (LD, 12/12, 22)

Colin had now been positioned as a troublemaker who had to be brought under control if the teacher was to maintain her power in the classroom. Colin accepted that he had done the wrong thing and was concerned to make amends.

I: What do you think will happen the next time you go in to this teacher's class

Colin: I don't know, she might send me straight out cos probably she couldn't be bothered puttin up with me muckin round and that or maybe she give me a chance to see if I can prove that I can do my work and the potential to do it. (CB 12/12, 52).

Possibly a major influence in Colin's regret over the situation may have been the consequences he might suffer — in this case, the power over consequences did hurt. Students who had attended classes regularly throughout the term — and that included Colin — were to go on a trip to the Adventure World playground the following day. If Colin was given a full day's suspension, however, he would be unable to participate. The power of the school to apply sanctions extended far beyond Colin's use of power in interpersonal contexts with Miss Drummond. It can be seen that Colin was being reconstructed by the school through the imposition of such sanctions. Rather than being able to please himself when and where he chose to work, he was being subjectified (Foucault 1982). Miss Drummond (along with other teachers) was making him into a compliant student: he was being, in one sense, normalised through the application of

sanctions; in another sense he was acquiring the docility (Foucault, 1975/1996) expected of a compliant student whose educational success depended upon such compliance.

Although Miss Drummond utilized her power to assert dominance over Colin, this was a corollary of her intention to continue his participation in learning. She said,

> I got him a pen which he didn't have, I got him a book, and I got him everything and gave him the choice and said listen Colin, if you're sent out it means you go straight to the Deputy etc. Which do you want to do? He just refused to answer. He said, I don't know etc. Eventually I spent a good 5 or 10 minutes trying to persuade him. After that he said, "Oh no, I'll go and get suspended" and he went. But all he had to do then was make some slight effort to do some work. It wasn't - it was some research they had to do in groups. He was working in a group with a different group. The rest of the group was okay. and Colin can do it, he is not unable to. (LD, 12/12, 12).

Miss Drummond could have acted in a similar manner to Kay Falls who gave no quarter to Steve Wallace, particularly following Colin's performance in the previous week. Instead she spent considerable time endeavoring to gain his compliance through reason and negotiation. Colin's behavior was not seen as a direct threat: it is clear that the teacher believed she could handle the difficulties he presented. Of greater moment was the need to appear to the rest of the class as a person of power and authority governed her actions. A picture emerges of both the teacher and the student being subject to forces greater than themselves: Colin subject to the combined weight of the school's MSB system; the teacher constrained by the potential of widespread student opposition. Here there is no simple oppositional behavior in which the student resists the teacher and the teacher dominates the student; rather, the context in which their actions occur influences both: the broader implications of his actions lead Colin to regret his behavior while the teacher is forced into the use of power despite her desire to gain Colin's willing cooperation. This was consistent with Foucault's view that power does not reside in one location but is everywhere (Grant, 1997).

Given the much stronger performance of Miss Drummond in this second disciplinary action with Colin, it appears that the first incident in which Colin and Ken were sent to the specially organized buddy teacher may have been opportunistic. Having made the effort to organize the special arrangement, it is possible that she didn't want to waste an opportunity and sent Colin and Ken when she could have handled the situation herself.

Unlike other teachers who were interviewed, Lena Drummond appeared to be confident of her ability to manage the students. Even so, the continued maintenance of effective control among the whole class depended upon the visible exercise of power over students who were persistent offenders. Many of the teachers who were interviewed were insecure regarding their power to maintain effective control of the classroom. Rather than perceiving a right to control, they regarded the establishment of control as problematic and dependent upon their ability to get in early and eliminate dissent before it spread to other students. There was an implicit acknowledgment that control depended upon the creation of an image of competence and the use of power to maintain that image. Personal power was reinforced by institutional power through sending students to the deputy principal, buddy teachers, contract room or the year coordinator if the teacher believed in-class procedures had failed. Among the teachers interviewed there was no hesitation in employing the power of the institution to support their in-class power. Teachers did indicate, however, that some teachers in the school preferred not to use the system because it made their problems public (Robinson, 1992) .

Conclusion

The classrooms in which the reported events took place were sites of struggle rather than hegemonic structures in which the teacher ruled over the students. The relationship between the teachers and the students varied considerably but a common theme in the teacher interviews was the fear of losing control and there was frequent evidence of that

control being quite tenuous. Although in some of the cases investigated, the Aboriginal students deliberately sought to be sent from the room and so were entirely responsible for their own eviction, more often the events that preceded eviction would have been harmless in other contexts (particularly talking in class) (Galloway, 1981) and the students reported that they considered their treatment to be unfair. The findings of this study are consistent with Steed's (1985) finding that teachers' misuse of their authority bred resentment, apathy and aggression among students .

The act of a student being sent from the room by the teacher does not necessarily mean that the student had committed an offence warranting such action. In the most extreme incidents, teachers can be characterized by an unwillingness to acknowledge the validity of student experience. Rejection of the out-of-class and out-of-school life of the students meant that factors that made a significant contribution to the students' participation in class were excluded and this was a starting point for resentment and misunderstanding. The primacy of school knowledge and school practices without the ameliorating influence of relevant and meaningful contexts for the students significantly contributed to behavior problems. When the power exercised by the school, and the knowledge which was connected to that power, held no significance for students, the teachers were rendered powerless. In the case of Colin, when a sanction of value was imposed, he regretted the consequences of his actions.

Students who are implicated in disruptions in the classroom often are exercising the kinds of behaviors which would attract no comment in other settings. While the rest of the world has changed, so that children's expression is now accepted without comment, schools remain locked in an anachronistic set of expectations regarding the behavior of students. To be seen and not heard is no longer relevant. Whether schools need to function with such stern controls over student communication and behavior is questionable (White, 1993). If they can't, perhaps it is time to change the schools rather than the students.

Of course, there are behaviors that do warrant the imposition of sanctions on students. Most classroom disturbances, however, can be regarded as a consequence of normal students doing ordinary things in an inappropriate context. Unlike most, if not all, other social settings in which students find themselves, classrooms are sites of abnormality where freedoms are curtailed and minute surveillance of students is practiced. In this study, however, most of the behaviors that attracted sanctions were trivial. What is more, they were usually perceived to be so by the students who were aware of the relative significance of their actions and questioned the fairness of a system that imposed severe sanctions for what is normal social behavior. Only in prisons and mental institutions does such similar close monitoring of behaviors take place. For an institution which purports to prepare children and youth for participation in society, the practices and values that are promoted in schools appear quite inappropriate and it is desirable to make changes which restore to students a normality which matches that of society outside the classroom.

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